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The Beauty of Fish Scales



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service · Follow

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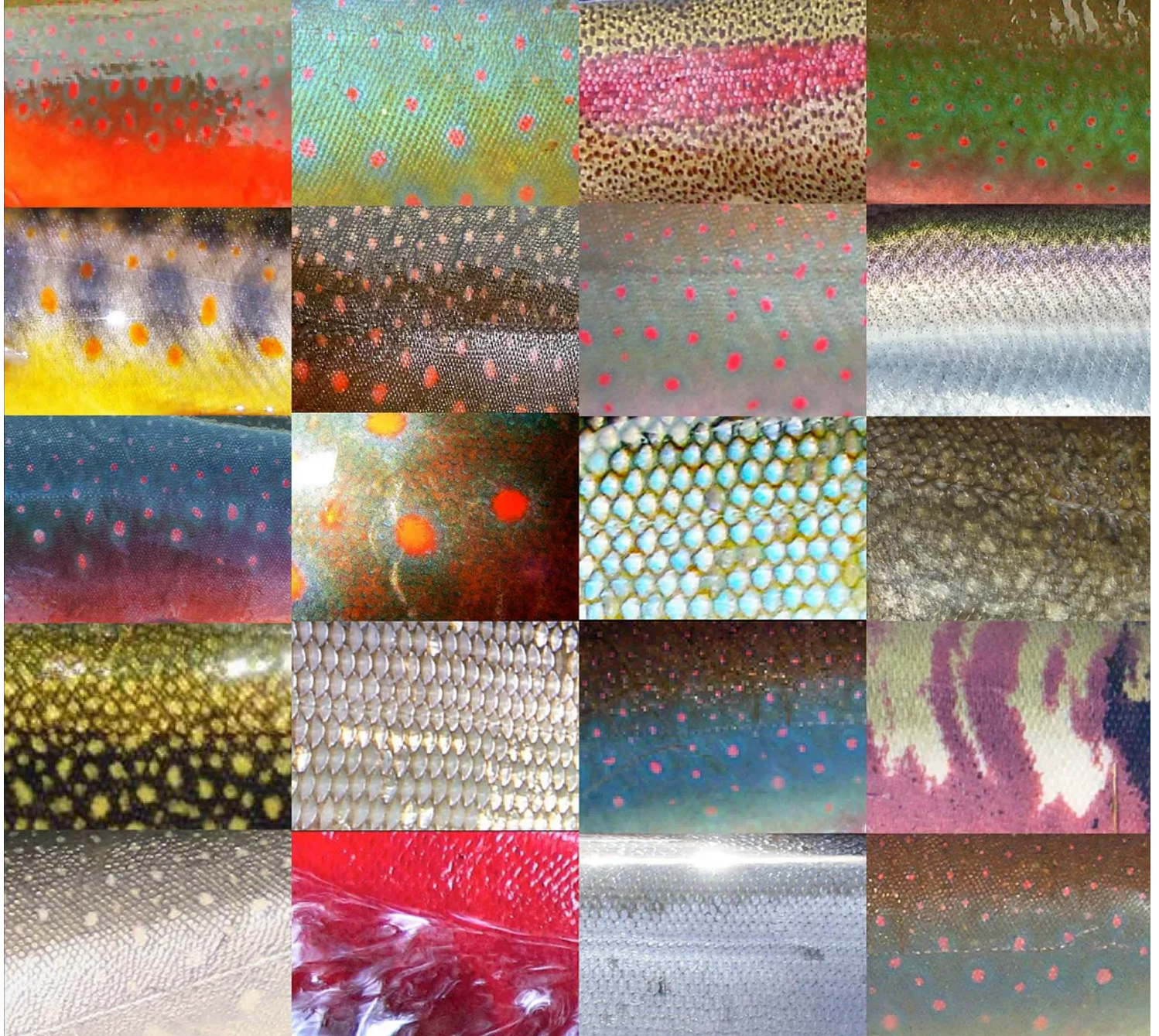
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Fish are absolutely beautiful. There, it's been said. They're often out of sight, well-camouflaged, and beneath the surface, so appreciating their beauty is sometimes difficult to do. It's for that reason why we've chosen to take a closer look at these stunning beauties and appreciate them for their aesthetic.



Fish Scales by Katrina Liebich, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

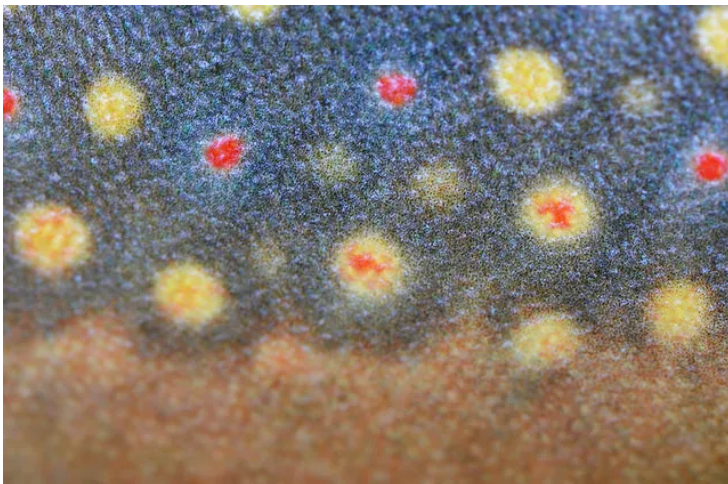
Brook Trout

Some of our most colorful freshwater fish, brook trout scales are striking when you see them. Living mostly in small flowing streams at higher elevation, their sensitivity to pollution limits where they can survive. Eastern

brook trout range in color from green to brown, with light marbling on the top and scattered red spots with blue outlines. Their lower fins are deep red and sport a white outline.



Male coaster brook trouts are easily identified by their vibrant colors. Photo by Katie Steiger-Meister, USFWS.



Left: Female coaster brook trouts can be identified by their colorful yellow and red pattern. Photo by Katie Steiger-Meister, USFWS. || Right: Eastern brook trout range in color from green to brown. Photo by USFWS.

Rainbow Trout

Rainbow trout are easily identified by the broad reddish band or “rainbow” which runs along their side from head to tail. The reddish band blends into a dark olive green on the back and pure white or silver on the belly. The back, dorsal fin and tail are generously sprinkled with black spots. The brightness of color varies with where the rainbow trout lives and what it eats. Look for them in prime trout waters that are clear, clean and cold.



Left: Rainbow trout come in all shapes and sizes but they're all beautiful. This one's home is Meadow Creek, Alaska.
Photo by Ryan Hagerty, USFWS.

Dolly Varden

Dolly Varden char (Dollies for short) are perhaps the most flamboyant of the char species. When migrating, they are usually dark green on the back with silvery sides and white underneath. Prior to spawning both male and female Dolly Varden can exhibit a variety of color combinations as they change to their full spawning colors, all of them vibrantly beautiful.



Left: Dolly Varden Char by Trent Leibich || Right: This char is dressed to impress courtesy V. Orange.

Sockeye Salmon

Showing off a lovely and shimmering silver, while in the ocean, they'll change colors when they cross back into freshwater. When adult sockeye are ready to spawn they typically turn a vibrant red, with a green head, hence why they are commonly called "red" salmon in Alaska.



Sockeye Salmon by Lisa Hupp, USFWS.



Sockeye Salmon aka Red Salmon by Lisa Hupp, USFWS.



Sockeye salmon sporting their spawning colors. Photo by Katrina Liebich, USFWS.

Florida Gar

Not only beautiful, but fascinating, gars have ganoid scales. These scales are composed primarily of ganoine, which is closely related to enamel in our teeth! Recent research links the two evolutionarily, and also helps explain why gar scales are so hard and tough.



Florida Gar head. Photo courtesy of Solomon David.



Florida Gar scales are tough. Photo courtesy of Solomon David.

Bluegill

The bluegill is a moderately large fish and gets its name from the large blue spot on the back of its gill. Another characteristic that helps identify this species are the evenly spaced dark bars along its back. The bluegill can easily adapt to various water bodies but prefer lakes or slow moving streams. They are most active in early morning.



Bluegill underwater by Ryan Hagerty, USFWS.

Reasons to Keep Them Wet

Fish are famous for the texture of their scales, but they are slimy for a reason ! Fish scales are covered in a coating of mucus to protect them from fungus and external parasites. If you plan on catching then releasing a fish, be sure to wet your hands first to help fish keep their slime coat intact.



Photo: Native Rio Grande cutthroat trout by Craig Springer, USFWS.

There's a whole movement to ease the stress on fish when they are caught by encouraging anglers to "Keep em wet", or keep the fish in water. By doing this, you ensure you're releasing the fish in the best condition possible.

By Danielle Brigida, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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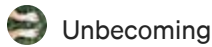
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